

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 0757

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OTRA, VT, XF

SUBJECT: RABBI HERSHBERG AT VATICAN

REF: STATE 010598

1. IN HIS BRIEF STOPOVER IN ROME, RABBI ABRAHAM M. HERSHBERG, CHAIRMAN OF INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH COMMITTEE ON PEACE AND RELIGION, MET SEPARATELY WITH MSGR. ANDREA MONTEZEMOLO, SECRETARY OF PONTIFICAL COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, AND FATHER DE CONTONSON, SECRETARY OF NEWLY ESTABLISHED COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH JUDAISM. DURING HIS TALK WITH DE CONTONSON, RABBI HERSHBERG BROUGHT ALONG CHIEF RABBI OF ROME, ELIO TAOFF, WHO SURPRISINGLY HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY MET VATICAN OFFICIALS DEALING WITH JUDAISM. VATICAN OFFICIALS, OBVIOUSLY PREVIOUSLY AWARE OF HERSHBERG'S ACTIVITIES, RECEIVED HIM EAGERLY AND WERE SEEMINGLY IMPRESSED WITH HIS ABILITY AS A JEW TO MOVE FREELY IN MOSLEM CIRCLES. HERSHBERG, WHO CLAIMS TO HAVE HAD LENGHTY MEETING WITH POPE PAUL SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WAS UNABLE TO MEET

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WITH POPE THIS TIME BUT VATICAN EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO ARRANGE

AUDIENCE IN FUTURE PROVIDED SUFFICIENT ADVANCE NOTICE GIVEN.

2. HERSHBERG'S MAIN THESIS IS THAT IN DIVIDED WORLD WHERE ATHEISTIC FORCES OF COMMUNISM IN ASCENDENCY, IT IS NECESSARY FOR ALL BELIEVING MEN TO UNITE AND COOPERATE IN ASSULT AGAINST GODLESS ENEMY. HE FEELS THAT COMMON BELIEF IN SAME GOD SHOULD BE SUFFICIENTLY STRONG FACTOR TO BRING TOGETHER ALL CHRISTIANS, MOSELMs AND JEWS AND THT OTHER DEVISIVE FORCES SHOULD WITHER IN FACE OF THIS ELEMENT OF UNITY. THIS THESIS ALSO STRONGLY HELD BY POPE PAUL AND, FOR THIS REASON, MOST LIKELY THAT VATICAN SEES IN HERSHBERG A SMALL BUT NEVERTHELESS POSSIBLE BRIDGE OVER GAP PRESENTLY SEPARATING MEMBERS OF THREE GREAT MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS IN MIDDLE EAST.

3. BOTH HERSHBERG AND OUR VATICAN SOURCES REPORT GROWING AWARENESS AMONG MOSLEM LAY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF DANGERS TO THEIR RELIGIOUS INTEGRITY INHERENT IN CLOSE TIES WITH COMMUNIST WORLD. HERSHBERG'S APPROACH TO POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF MIDDLE EAST ALSO PARALLESL VATICAN'S TO DEGREE THAT THEY BOTH BELIEVE IF BEGINNING CAN BE MADE TO BRING TOGETHER PEOPLES ON RELIGIOUS LEVEL, THIS CAN HELP TO DEFUSE ANIMOSITIES AND HAVE POSITIVE SPILL-OVER ONTO POLITICAL SCENE.

4. HERSHBERG'S ULTIMATE GOAL SEEMS TO BE THE HOLDING OF A CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM-JEWISH CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST. VOLPE

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